

(English version)

Priority question for written answer P-002077/23
to the Commission
Niels Fuglsang (S&D)
(30 June 2023)

Subject: EU strategic partnerships on raw materials

Given the war in Ukraine, the disruption of global supply chains and the objectives of the European Green Deal, it is paramount that the EU strengthen its resilience and secure the strategic resources it needs to achieve the green transition. The Commission's proposal for a critical raw materials act includes the provision that no third country can account for over 65% of the EU's imports of any strategic raw material. Partnerships with third countries in this area are very positive and are critical for the EU's resilience. However, the process of concluding such partnerships and the subsequent action plans lack transparency and any form of oversight by Parliament. Given this:

1. How many strategic partnerships on critical raw materials does the Commission currently have, what partnerships are currently being negotiated and what partnerships does the Commission plan to initiate in future, particularly in view of the priorities of the strategic partnership with Greenland?
2. What are the connections between the EU's strategic partnerships on raw materials and its trade agreements with third countries?
3. What instruments can the Commission use to ensure high sustainability standards for mining projects in third countries with which the EU has concluded a strategic partnership on raw materials?

Submitted: 30.6.2023

Answer given by Mr Breton on behalf of the European Commission
(31 July 2023)

Strategic partnerships on raw materials are established as non-binding instruments and follow the EU procedures for this type of instruments.

The EU has partnerships with Canada, Ukraine, Namibia, Kazakhstan, Argentina and Chile. The EU is negotiating partnerships with Norway, Greenland and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It will start negotiations with other countries in the near future.

To date, strategic partnerships have been agreed with countries with whom the EU has negotiated or concluded a trade and investment agreement. Such agreements and strategic partnerships are complementary.

Provisions in trade agreements are legally binding, while partnerships offer a political framework for concrete bilateral cooperation in the specific field of raw materials, to turn economic opportunities into mutually beneficial realities.

Partnerships include cooperation and support for alignment on environmental, social and governance standards between the EU and the partner country.

Projects developed under the partnerships are assessed against international standards covering all aspects of sustainability highlighted in the EU principles for sustainable raw materials ⁽¹⁾, including environmental protection, socially responsible practices, as respect for human rights and transparent business practices.

Sustainable development is an essential component of the EU's modern trade agreements. Relevant legislation already in force ⁽²⁾ or proposed ⁽³⁾ EU legislation completes the set of instruments addressing sustainable sourcing of critical raw materials (CRM).

⁽¹⁾ European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, EU principles for sustainable raw materials, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2873/09707>.

⁽²⁾ REGULATION (EU) 2017/821 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 May 2017 laying down supply chain due diligence obligations for Union importers of tin, tantalum and tungsten, their ores, and gold originating from conflict-affected and high-risk areas.

⁽³⁾ COM(2020) 798 final — Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL concerning batteries and waste batteries, repealing Directive 2006/66/EC and amending Regulation (EU) No 2019/1020 COM(2022) 71 final — Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 COM(2022) 453 final — Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market.

The proposed CRM Regulation ⁽⁴⁾ complements these initiatives, by requiring that all strategic projects are implemented sustainably.

⁽⁴⁾ COM(2023) 160 final — Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amending Regulations (EU) 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/1020.